

UCEPS OPINION POLL: nation, power, referendum

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Over the recent months, Ukraine has been the arena of important political developments that will surely influence both its internal and foreign policies. The most significant events were the re-election of Leonid Kuchma as the «new» president, the appointment of reformer Viktor Yushchenko as the head of the Government, certain limitations placed on the influence of oligarchs (at least in the process of the Government's formation), the split within the Verkhovna Rada into the «majority» and «minority», the declaration of a new stage of administrative reform, the preparation for the all-Ukrainian referendum, etc.

The restructuring of the state's political facade has long been on the agenda. This may bring some positive results in the long run, including within the social and political spheres. Thus far, however, these political games have been played against the background of deteriorating living standards of ordinary citizens: commodity and service prices are up, the population's real incomes are falling, unemployment is on the rise, power supplies to Ukrainian towns and villages are cut with increasing frequency. Another reason for concern lies in the ineffective (inadequate for the present situation) organisation and co-ordination of the power branches: the Government staff, the Verkhovna Rada, the National Security and Defence Council, and the Presidential Administration. Endless reshuffling and administrative campaigns hamper the normal operation of these significant governmental bodies.

How does the average man in the street assess the political situation which has emerged in Ukraine? What is his idea regarding renewed government structures? How are the present Ukrainian authorities meeting the criteria defined by the public? Will the population resort to resolute actions should the situation not improve? Will Ukrainians support President Kuchma's referendum proposals?

In order to answer these questions, between January 25 and February 5, 2000 the sociological service of the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies canvassed Ukraine's citizens. In all, 2010 individuals were questioned in all of Ukraine's regions; the sampling structure corresponded to Ukraine's adult population structure. The results of this sociological study performed by UCEPS are presented below.

The diagram shows that Ukraine's citizens hold a rather demanding attitude toward the authorities. In their opinion, the authorities should be «responsible» (this view is shared by 98.1% of those polled¹), «honest» (97.6%), «competent» (96.7%), «democratic» (83.9%) and «predictable» (82%).

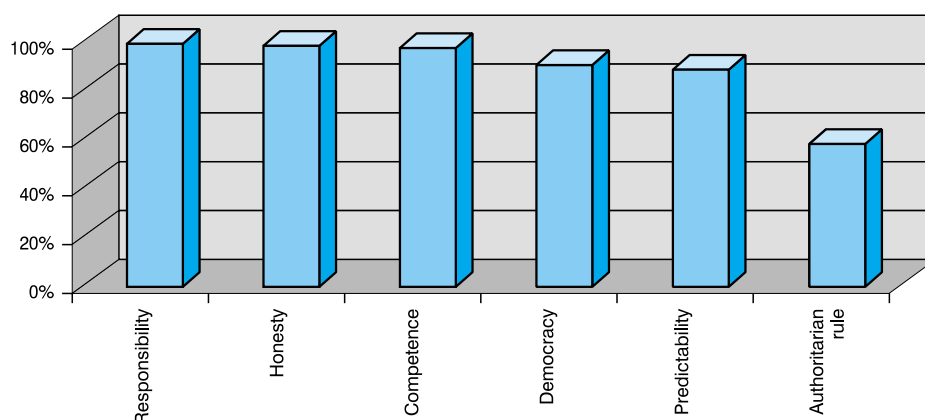
It is evident that the perception of Ukrainians regarding the ideal government is not far different from those of other nations. There are probably certain requisites that never change and are independent of time or country. Even in the 16th century, N. Machiavelli wrote that «in the eyes of the people, a statesman must be compassionate, true to his word, merciful, generous, and pious»². Generally speaking, this would be not a bad frame of reference for the present leaders.

It is also clear that Ukraine's present authorities do not meet the criteria determined by the poll results. What's important is that average citizens and state leaders realise this: more than once President L. Kuchma and the Prime Minister V. Yushchenko both emphasised the need for large-scale administrative reform, the creation of an effective parliamentary majority, a more active struggle against corruption in all power branches and government agencies, and greater transparency in the vital decision-making process.

¹ Respondents who consider the relevant qualities «very important» and «rather important» were counted.

² N. Machiavelli. «Statesman». — Moscow, 1990, p. 53.

What would Ukrainians expect from the authorities?



It is hardly accidental that «democracy» occupies only the fourth rather first position in the overall rating of requirements for authorities. In our opinion, the position held by those polled was influenced by the following factors: (a) a deterioration of the living standards of the majority of the populace which coincided with the period of democratic transformation; (b) a certain degree of unfitness of democratic decision-making mechanisms with respect to Ukrainian society's transitional (critical) status³. Furthermore, a negative attitude toward democracy was expressed by many respondents within the senior citizen age group (above 60)⁴ who lived under the less democratic but more stable Soviet regime.

It is perhaps for these reasons that more than half of those polled (57.7%) believe that «authoritarian» rule should exist in Ukraine. That the establishment of a legal state and the consolidation of civil society will be a lengthy process is understandable. For example, in Great Britain democratic traditions were formed over the centuries; its first parliament was elected as early as 1219. The establishment of effective mechanisms for civil society in Ukraine is hindered not only due to slow institutional change, but also, to a certain extent, to the inertia of the public's conscience⁵.

In general, Ukrainians want their authorities to be responsible, honest, competent, democratic and predictable. A relatively high position of authoritarian rule in this rating may be explained primarily by the hardships of the transitional period when mass consciousness is prepared to support a rule which is strong and dynamic.

HOW DO UKRAINIANS ASSESS UKRAINE'S PRESENT AUTHORITIES?

The UCEPS sociological service proposed that respondents not only define the criteria for assessing authorities (their ideal representation), but also to assess how well Ukraine's

present authorities correspond to those criteria. The general conclusion reached was not difficult to predict: none satisfies the people. At the same time, there are clear differences in the assessments of the activities of the Ukrainian President, the Government, the Verkhovna Rada and local authorities.

³ For many, it is now clear that in a crisis situation it is impractical and inexpedient to take all decisions (and especially operative decisions) on the basis of a consensus between People's Deputies and parliamentary factions through the lengthy process of two or three Verkhovna Rada hearings. It takes months and years, while some decisions should be taken immediately.

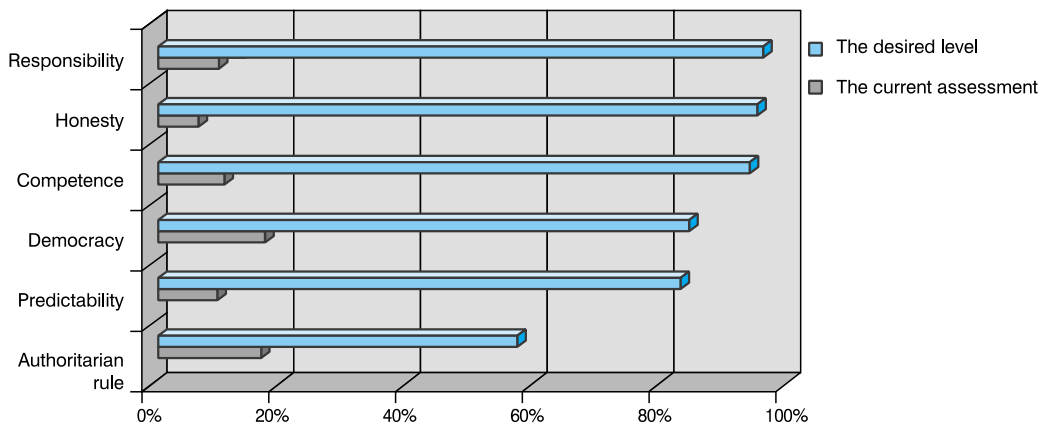
⁴ The thorough analysis of the UCEPS opinion poll results demonstrates this.

⁵ Under the influence of Christian Byzantium, the idea of strong government and the myth of the «beneficent ruler» began its establishment in the political and legal consciousness in Kievan Rus early on. The «Edification» of Volodymyr Monomachos (1096) gave what was probably the first description of the ideal prince, pointing to such qualities as education, hard work for the benefit of the state, care for the «lowlife», strict control over the state machinery (boyars are bad, but the ruler is good). After a short period of Hetman rule with its democratic character, Ukraine became incorporated into the Russian Empire, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and the USSR which events cover a long period of time. This affected Ukrainians' mass consciousness significantly; after centuries, authoritarian sentiments became firmly established.

UKRAINE'S VERKHOVNA RADA

The data obtained (*see Diagram*) show that today's Verkhovna Rada corresponds to the criteria established for the ideal representation of a state power body less than all other authorities do.

Compliance of the Verkhovna Rada with the established criteria of an ideal authority



Only 8.8% of Ukrainians consider the Ukrainian Parliament to be «responsible». An even lesser number of those polled (6.1%) agree that «honesty» is characteristic of Verkhovna Rada activity. Only one in nine polled (11.3%) considers Parliament to be a «competent» body, and one in ten (9.9%) believes that it is «predictable». An unexpectedly small share (15.9%) of Ukrainians are certain that the Parliament is «democratic». Meanwhile, the Verkhovna Rada was elected by Ukraine's population as a representative body.

At the same time, more than half of those polled (59.9%) consider the Ukrainian Parliament to be «corrupt». When compared to all other state power bodies, this is the highest index. Only 17% of those polled feel certain that the Verkhovna Rada's activities are «transparent». One in six respondents (15.1%) pointed to Parliament's «authoritarianism».

UCEPS experts suggest that this generally negative assessment of the Verkhovna Rada's activity is related to consistent disappointment with the work of the legislative body. This opinion was expressed more than once by the head of state, representatives of the executive branch and parliamentary faction leaders; this idea has long been implanted through influential electronic and printed mass media. The reasons for this included a delay in the adoption of vitally important legislation, the inefficiency of parliamentary committees, the use of the Verkhovna Rada's rostrum for propagating party ideas (rather than for diligent legislative work), the barefaced lobbying by People's Deputies of their own business interests, and the split of Parliament into «majority» and «minority» factions. Finally, the

case of Pavlo Lazarenko and the publication of information regarding the illegal activities of other People's Deputies could not but have their effect on the Verkhovna Rada's image.



Nearly 40% of those polled feel certain that «Parliament's existence is a guarantee of democracy», while 28.9% holds the opposite opinion. Approximately two-thirds of the population (61.5%) do not agree that «one of the reasons for a negative attitude toward the Verkhovna Rada is that the population views its activity to be the most transparent».

The results of the studies performed by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of



the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine⁶ correspond to the conclusions made by UCEPS: 44.4% of those polled feel certain that «the Verkhovna Rada's activity does not contribute to Ukraine's economic and political development, hampers progress in domestic life and economic reform»; another 28.9% believes that «Parliament makes decisions that run contrary to legislation in effect, in defiance of procedural norms».

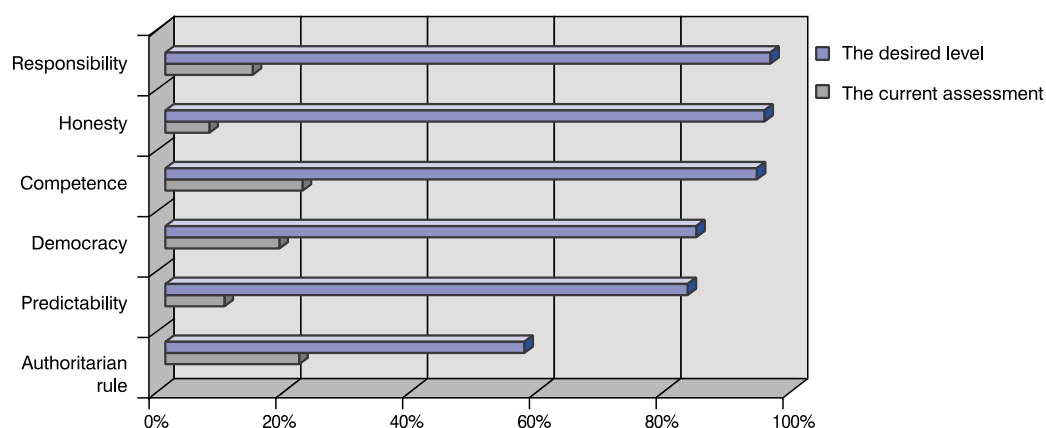
The majority of Ukrainians, therefore, view the Verkhovna Rada's activity rather critically. This generally negative attitude towards People's Deputies emerged several years ago. In 1996, 62% of Ukrainians argued that People's Deputies «are motivated by their own interests», 16% suggested that they contest for their seats «to gain publicity and good berths», 8% considered that their main motive was «to travel around the world». Only 5% of respondents felt certain that People's Deputies «wanted to work for the benefit of society and the people»⁷.

Experts believe that the disappointment in parliamentary practice is specific not only to Ukraine, but for nearly all of the CIS countries. Russian political scientist V. Amelin noted that «increasingly more people are becoming disappointed in such political institutions as representative democracy and elections»⁸. Leaders of some CIS countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia) were timely in channelling their citizens' disappointment

and dissatisfaction with their parliaments (through referendums) in order to expand presidential powers. UCEPS studies show that in the event of the referendum scheduled for April 16, 2000, Ukraine's population will express its distrust in the present Verkhovna Rada, support President Kuchma's proposal to reduce the number of People's Deputies (from 450 to 300) and, under certain conditions, will support Parliament's dissolution.

UCEPS experts suggest that the Verkhovna Rada's early dissolution would not cause mass protests of Ukraine's population. Public consciousness is now prepared for the President to play a greater role in the state's political life. A large share of the population would support an expansion of his powers (and those who have not made up their minds yet may be easily convinced with the assistance of advanced election technologies). Unfortunately, a negative attitude toward the Verkhovna Rada creates a negative perception of parliamentary practice in general. It would be very dangerous should antagonism toward Parliament become established within the mass consciousness as an instrument of the country's political life. Ukraine has embarked on the endeavour of building a democratic state with a clear distribution of competence and responsibility between the branches of powers. We cannot allow for the legislative body's role to diminish, as that would destroy the system of checks and balances important for society's stable progress.

Compliance of the Ukrainian Government with the established criteria of an ideal authority



UKRAINE'S GOVERNMENT

The poll results show that there is a better correspondence between the Ukrainian Government and the representation of ideal authority when compared to Parliament. However, public estimates generally remain low: only one index reached a 20% public support mark (see Diagram). 8.8% of those polled consider the pres-

⁶ Monitoring of people's attitude toward the decisions and actions of the President of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. — The Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, July 1999, p.13.

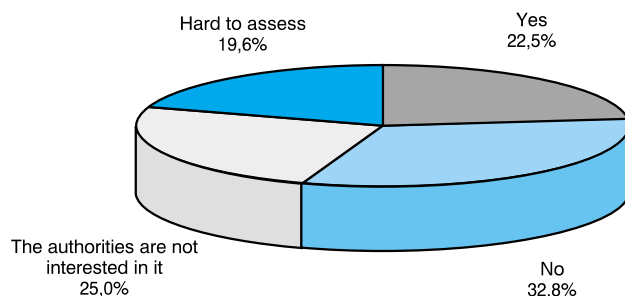
⁷ The Ukrainian Political and Economic Index. — Socis-Gallup, Kyiv, June 1996, p. 12.

⁸ V. Amelin. Impact of representative relations on the election process. Bulletin of the Moscow State University. Series 18. Sociology and Politology. — Moscow, 1998, No. 4, p. 49.

ent Government to be «honest», 13% believe that it is «predictable». The Government surpassed the Verkhovna Rada in the «competence» category and «authoritarianism» (20.5% and 19.8% of respondents, respectively). More than half of the population (54%) considers the Ukrainian Government «corrupt».

As the diagram below makes clear, 32.8% of respondents feel certain that the present authorities «are unable to develop a program of action and implement it in a consistent manner»; another 25% suggest that the authorities «are not interested» in this. This may be unfortunate, but such a conclusion is not without its grounds. Over the years of independence, none of the eight governments has managed to achieve the key goals which it declared. The program of the Cabinet of Ministers headed by Prime Minister V. Pustovoitenko, who was in office longer than any other Government head (over two years), was not even approved by Parliament.

Are the present authorities able to work out and implement a program of action?



Today, much hope is being placed on the new government team headed by V. Yushchenko. The situation, however, remains difficult, and no clear changes for the better are in view. At the same time, Parliament cancelled privileges for many categories of the population on the proposal of the Cabinet of Ministers. This was a necessary step, since the state's declared social commitments were not backed by

resources⁹. The population will have to accept these measures, painful as they may be, and this will not add to the Government's popularity.

According to «Socis-Gallup»¹⁰, 31% of Ukrainians today «entirely trust» V. Yushchenko — the highest mark obtained among Ukrainian politicians. Only 14% of those polled, however, «entirely trust» the Government, on the whole. Today, therefore, the population's trust in the executive authority, an important precondition for economic revival, is low. In his time, President Nixon would say: «A leader must have the will to take unpopular steps when they are necessary... And when he considers it necessary to take unpopular steps, he should explain them to people, gain their support and win backing for his actions»¹¹. Unfortunately, the opinion exists that the present Government has no task-oriented and carefully designed strategy for mass media coverage of its activities.

Trust in Ukraine's Government is generally low. This hinders reform and delays the implementation of the required unpopular steps. Should the population become disappointed in the Yushchenko Government, the consequences will be serious: people may lose hope in the possibility of gradually overcoming the crisis in Ukraine. It should not be ruled out that in such a situation the idea of appointing someone as Prime Minister from within the power structures, and the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in executive body activities may prevail within the higher echelons of power. The poll performed by UCEPS demonstrates the reluctance of Ukraine's population to accept «military rule»: today, only 7.1% of Ukrainians would support this form of governing.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local authorities are closest to the people. Their activities directly influence the public's attitude toward the country's authorities in general. UCEPS poll data shows that, in general, the public holds a rather critical assessment of the activities of local authorities (*see Diagram*) and, therefore, does not relate hopes for solving personal problems to them.

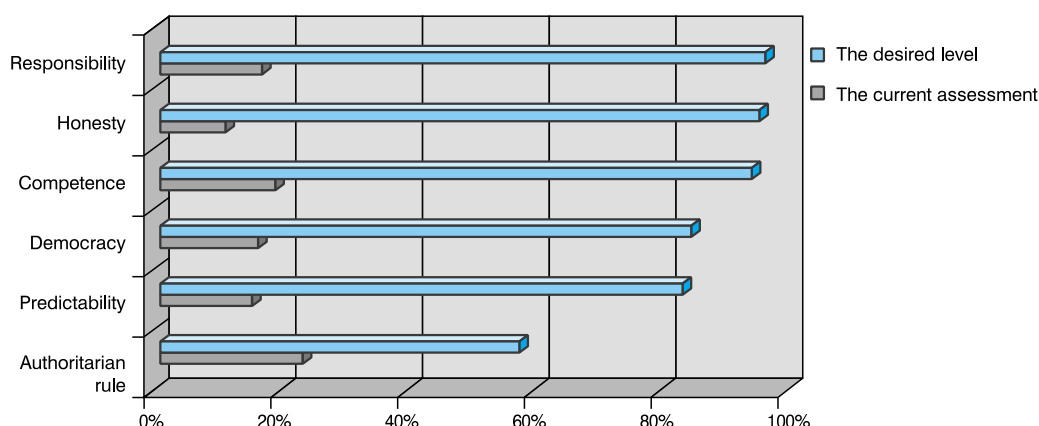
⁹ The problems of the 2000 budget revenues are reviewed in an article by a UCEPS expert V. Skarshevskiy printed in this edition.

¹⁰ Interfax-Ukraine, February 21, 2000.

¹¹ R. Reich. The Power of Public Ideas. — Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988, p.179.



Compliance of Ukraine's local authorities with the established criteria of an ideal authority



Every fifth respondent (22,2%) feels certain about the «authoritarianism» of the local authorities. Only one in ten (10.7%) describes their activity as «honest». It is disturbing that more than half of polled citizens (54.8%) considers local authorities «corrupt».

UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT

The UCEPS poll shows that the assessment of the President of Ukraine is closer to the criteria of the ideal authority established by respondents, as compared to other power branches. However, only some features of the head of state are assessed positively by more than 30% of those polled (*see Diagram*).

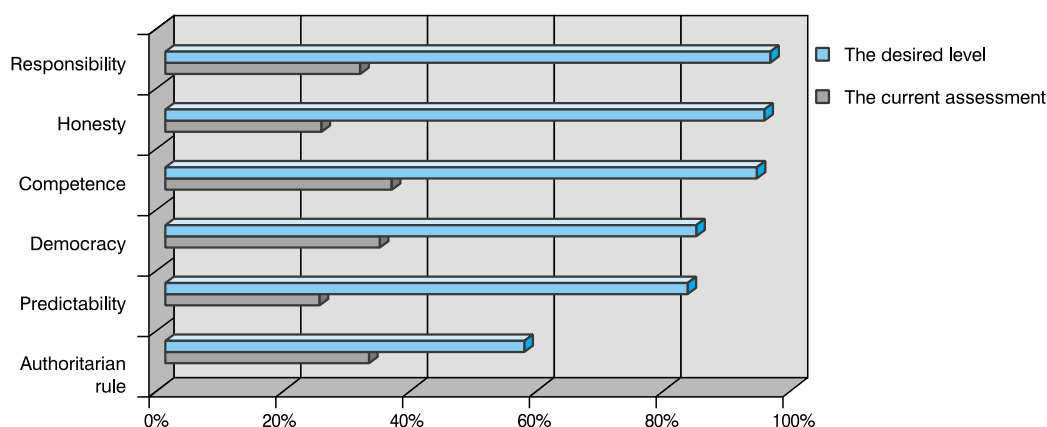
30.3% of respondents consider the present President of Ukraine to be «responsible», 24.3% — «honest», 35.2% — «competent», 33.4% — «democratic», 24% — «predictable», 23% — «transparent». Nearly one-third of those polled (31.7%) feel certain that the head of state is an «authoritarian» leader.

The activities of the President's staff are assessed more negatively: 46.5% of those polled consider the staff of the head of state «corrupt»; far fewer respondents feel certain that its work is «transparent» (15.5%), «honest» (11.3%) and «responsible» (17%).

This distinctive difference in the assessment of the President of Ukraine and his staff (which actually prepares most of the proposals and organises the head of state's activity) may be explained by the following reasons. First: the activity of Ukraine's President is widely covered by the mass media, while the staff works out of the public eye and is not transparent to the average citizen. Second: presidential structures were reshuffled after the elections, and new people unknown to the public were appointed to responsible posts. As far as the high index of the staff's «corruption»

is concerned, this thought was imposed under the influence of printed mass media: almost daily, newspapers write about oligarchs in the President's inner circle, their incomes concealed in foreign banks, the misappropriation of billions of state funds, etc. In one way or another, the public relates these reports (not always convincingly refuted) to the activity of the President's staff.

Compliance of Ukraine's President with established criteria of an ideal authority





Despite a generally low estimate, Ukraine's President best corresponds to the ideal representation of authority in mass consciousness as determined by the polls.

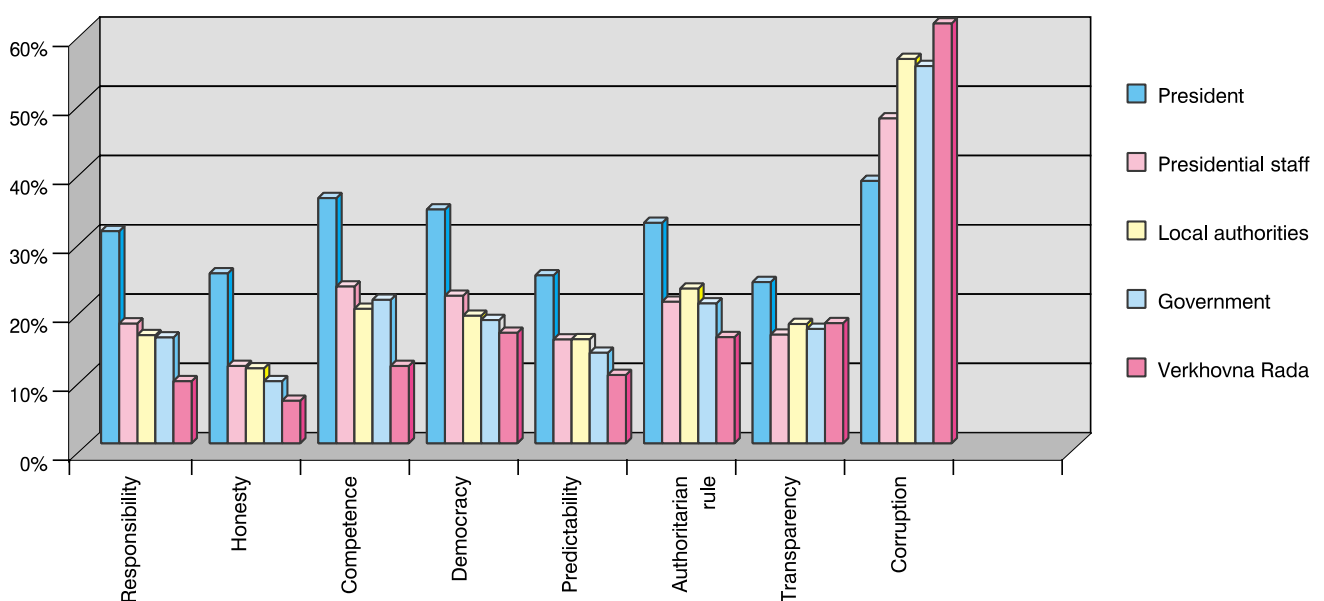
COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

The UCEPS poll demonstrated that Ukraine's authorities are still far from the ideal depicted by respondents (*see Diagram*). The public gives the President of Ukraine the highest assessment, but even this corresponds to the ideal image of power in the eyes of no more than one-third of the population.

The Ukrainian population's basis for assessing the activity of state authorities is primarily job availability, the living standard, real incomes, stable economic growth, accessibility to medicine and education, the effectiveness of the fight against crime, etc. The efficiency of this activity has not, thus far, become evident for rank-and-file Ukrainians.

The public's negative attitude toward authorities is further aggravated by numerous facts of corruption, bribery and abuse of power on the part of public servants (political figures). Only 2% of Ukrainians suggest that «almost nobody in the country takes bribes», while the majority of the polled hold the opposite opinion: «almost all take bribes and abuse their powers» — is believed by 12% of respondents; «many do it» — 49%, «some do it» — 29%. The high corruption level of authorities was noted by 35-60% of those polled (*see Diagram*).

Comparative assessment of state authorities





The system power crisis in Ukraine influences the population's mass consciousness: the discrepancy between the qualities of the present authorities and the criteria set by the people is too great. The man on the street most often associates his hopes with the institution of the presidency, which possesses the potential for resolute and dynamic actions that is so needed today by Ukraine to overcome the present crisis.

WHAT RULE WILL PEOPLE SUPPORT?

According to UCEPS poll results, the Ukrainian population supports democratic fundamentals of state power. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainians (61.2%) agree that «the democratic system may be associated with some problems, but it is better than any other rule». However, under social crisis conditions, the formation of democratic values is an uneasy process. A large share of those polled (41.5%) considers that «the democratic system means much talk and little work». In order for the country's democratisation process to become irreversible, resolute administrative reform is needed (suggesting not only structural but also functional changes in government structures), institutions of civil society must be formed, and relations between the authorities and individuals should change radically.

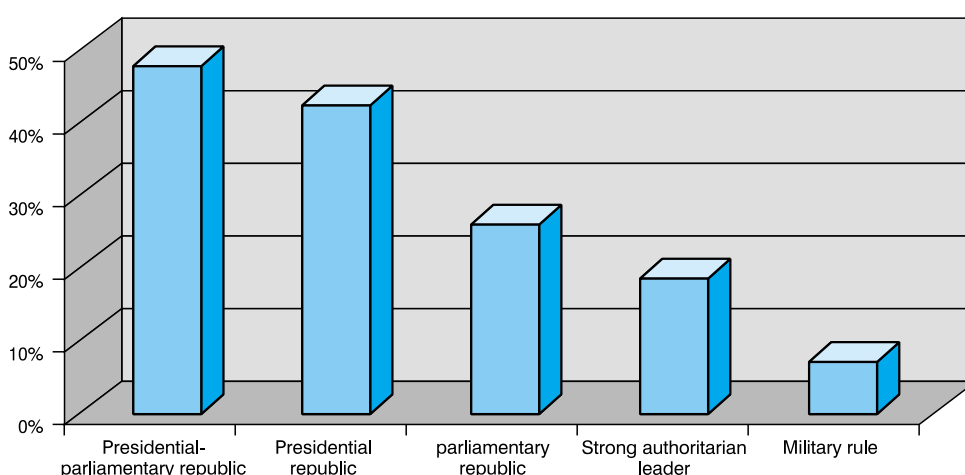
During the poll, respondents were proposed that they assess the acceptability of different forms of government for Ukraine (*the results are presented in the Diagram below*¹²). A large share of the population suggests that a presidential-parliamentary system or presidential republic would be best suited for this country (47.6% and 42.3% of those polled, respectively). A parliamentary republic was supported by 26% of those polled as a possible form of government in Ukraine. Experts believe that, in general, Ukrainian legal consciousness is oriented towards the acceptance of strong power under the limitations of a representative body. In the 17th century, under Hetman rule, a strong head of state (Hetman), the Government, the «black» convention (involving all Cossacks), and the seniors' convention worked together¹³. It was the seniors' convention that restrained authoritarian trends in the Hetman's actions and opposed the ochlocracy of the «black» convention.

Today, Ukraine is a presidential-parliamentary republic — the form supported by nearly one-half of the population (47.6%). Therefore, we may assume that the low estimate of the authorities' activities mentioned above is not a result of the fundamentals of the polity, but of the present state power bodies' low efficiency.

The diagram shows that only 18.6% of those polled support a «strong authoritarian leader unhindered by Parliament or the law». «Military rule» is even less popular: it was supported by only 7.1%. **The important point is that some disappointment on the part of the population in the present government and its low confidence in the authorities have not yet led to a radical change in the public's political frame of reference and to a rise in authoritarian tendencies in the collective consciousness of Ukrainians.**

The UCEPS poll showed that the initiative of the Communist Party of Ukraine to hold a ref-

Assessment of different forms of government by Ukrainians



¹² Respondents who consider this form of government «very good» and «rather good».

¹³ I. Zhdanov. Statehood and legal essence of Cossack conventions as a manifestation of democratic tendencies of the Ukrainian people // Scientific works of the Kamyranets-Podilskyi Pedagogical University: history — Kamyranets-Podilskyi, 1999, vol. 3(5), p. 30.

erendum on the cancellation of the institution of the presidency was supported by only 15.6% of the population; 49.4% of those polled were against such an act, while 35% had no firm opinion. These data demonstrate that the population attaches great importance to the President within the system of government in Ukraine¹⁴.

The results of the poll show that despite social and economic difficulties, the level of trust in democracy remains rather high in Ukraine. Authoritarian tendencies in the mass consciousness have not yet become threatening. The population is disappointed not in the form of government, but in the activity of specific power bodies. In the mass consciousness of Ukrainians, the stereotype of a strong power is noticeable; this is presently associated with the institution of the presidency. There are no evident preconditions within the society for the establishment of an authoritarian regime, let alone any form of dictatorship. In such a situation, the head of state must act resolutely and effectively within the framework of the Constitution and applicable legislation.

POLITICS IN THE LIFE OF UKRAINIANS

Despite the turbulent political life in Ukraine (presidential elections, the appoint-

ment of the new Government, an acute parliamentary crisis), political problems are becoming secondary, if not third-rate for the average citizen, and have little impact on his life¹⁵. Only 20% of Ukrainians noted that politics plays an important role in their lives. Among people of retirement age, this index is somewhat higher. In contrast, this indicator does not exceed 14% among people aged between 18 and 28. This signifies that youth is becoming increasingly estranged from politics.

In 1999, the rate of inflation and the fall in GDP slowed down in Ukraine. For the first time in years, industrial output rose (by 4.3%). Little has changed for the better, however, in the life of common people. Compared to 1998, the population's real incomes dropped by 10.9%; real wages — by 5.4%. According to official statistics¹⁶, more than one million Ukrainian families have real per capita incomes of less than UAH 50 (\$9) a month; for 100 thousand families, this indicator is a humiliatingly low — \$4. Undoubtedly, under such conditions Ukrainians are more concerned not with political, but social and economic problems: wage and pension arrears (60.9% of respondents), deterioration of living standards (58.9%) and employment problems (44.3%).

Meanwhile, statesmen and politicians are often concerned with other problems which are less urgent for the population, or to which it is entirely indifferent, such as Ukraine joining the union with Russia and Belarus, accession to NATO, work in the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the denunciation of agreements of Ukraine's nuclear-free status, etc. UCEPS polls show that political battles are of little interest for the average citizen. For example, in comparison to other problems, the possibility of joining NATO «concerns most of all» only 1.9% of those polled; the share of respondents concerned about the «possibility of restoring the Soviet Union» is equally low.

In general, the public activity of the Ukrainian population is aimed at solving socio-economic problems. A discrepancy exists between what concerns the people and the problems of the political elite.



¹⁴ Should the referendum occur, its results will be disastrous for communists, and won't improve their authority. According to «Socis-Gallup», a year ago (in March, 1999) 17% of Ukrainians would have voted for cancellation of the presidential post. The present tendency towards a split in the Communist Party of Ukraine and the possibility for the formation of another left party (the Ukrainian Communist Party) will, most probably, make the problem of the referendum a secondary one, while the referendum itself will unlikely occur.

¹⁵ Almost half of the population (48%) believes that political commitments «do not influence» their everyday behaviour, whereas they «moderately influence» the behaviour of 38%, and «strongly influence» the behaviour of only 10% of those polled.

¹⁶ «Interfax Ukraine», February 26, 2000.



THE UKRAINIAN POPULATION POLITICAL PREFERENCES

According to UCEPS polls, 18.5% of Ukrainians described their political views as left-oriented; 29.9% called themselves centrists; 16.8% consider themselves on the right¹⁷. A more detailed review of the results creates the following picture of the political spectrum of public preferences: 9.6% — extreme left; 8.9% — left centrists; 29.9% — centrists; 10.4% — right centrists; 6.4% — extreme right. Therefore, half of the respondents (49.2%) hold left centrist, centrist and right centrist views. The share of centrist-minded people rose over the previous years: February, 1996 — 18%¹⁸, February, 2000 — 29.9%.

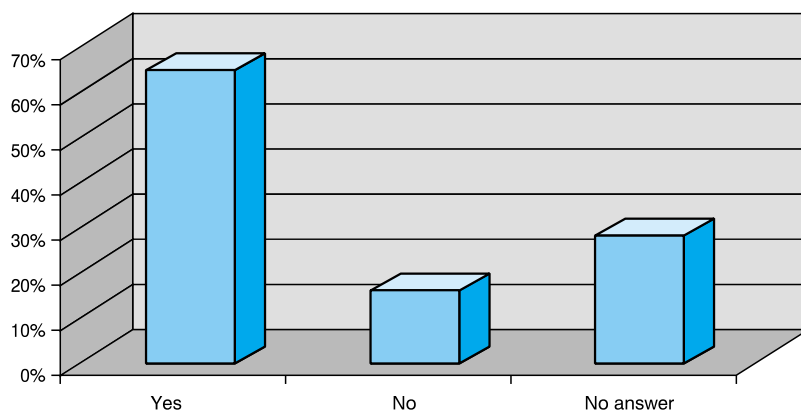
The political portrait of the present Verkhovna Rada noticeably differs from the political preferences of the voters who elected this Parliament. Indeed, two years ago, leftist parties¹⁹ collected 38% of the votes²⁰. Centrist parties²¹ were supported by 23.85% of the voters. This means that the left's representation in the Verkhovna Rada is oversized when

compared with the population's political preferences²².

Today, left political forces in Ukraine are in a difficult situation. They were disheartened by Leonid Kuchma's presidential election victory, and the results of the parliamentary «revolution» of the right majority. The left is scattered and split by internal conflicts. The situation is favourable to a parliamentary election (should such elections be held) victory by parties exploiting centrist ideas and their proximity to the authorities²³. One cannot rule out a repeat of the Russian scenario in Ukraine: the establishment of a stable and influential pro-presidential parliamentary majority, a further weakening of the left and their being pushed aside from solving the most important issues.

The UCEPS poll shows that one-half of Ukrainians now holds left centrist, centrist and right centrist views. This creates a good precondition for the consolidation of centrist parties. Radical political views do not enjoy public support, and the social basis for extremist parties is very weak in Ukraine. In the event of early parliamentary elections, a further decrease in the influence of the left and a higher representation of centrists in the Verkhovna Rada are predictable.

Do you distrust the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 14th convocation?



FOR CASTED RESULTS OF THE ALL-UKRAINIAN REFERENDUM

According to the UCEPS poll results, 77.1% of Ukrainians are ready to take part in the referendum — a rather high share two months before the voting. The analysis shows that Ukraine's President can count on firm support for five out of six referendum proposals. Presently, the only question that people do not support is the establishment of a two-chambered parliament.

61.8% of respondents²⁴ expressed their distrust in the Verkhovna Rada of the 14th con-

¹⁷ One-third (34.8%) of respondents were unable to define their position.

¹⁸ Monitoring of public opinion of the Ukrainian population. — Centre «Social Monitoring», the Ukrainian Research Institute of Problems of Youth, Kyiv, April, 1997, p. 7.

¹⁹ The Communist Party of Ukraine, the Socialist Party of Ukraine, the Peasant Party of Ukraine and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine.

²⁰ Taking into account «Hromada», supported by a large share of the protesting electorate, this figure will reach 42.7%.

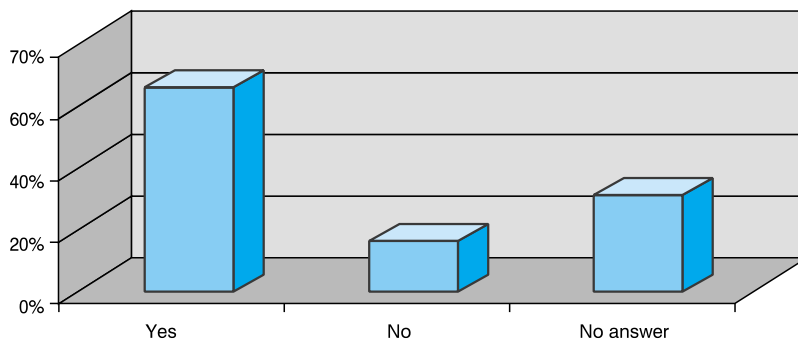
²¹ The People's Rukh of Ukraine, the Popular Democratic Party of Ukraine, the Green Party of Ukraine and the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United).

²² This may be explained by the following reasons: (1) the left is supported by protest voters who vote against the acting authorities rather than for the left; (2) unlike the left, the centrist electorate is badly organised; (3) the mixed majority-proportional election system provides additional parliamentary seats for the winning parties at the expense of the losers that did not overcome the 4% barrier. In the latest parliamentary elections, the Communist Party of Ukraine collected 25% of the votes, equivalent to 63 parliamentary mandates, but due to the re-distribution of votes, communists obtained a total of 84 mandates.

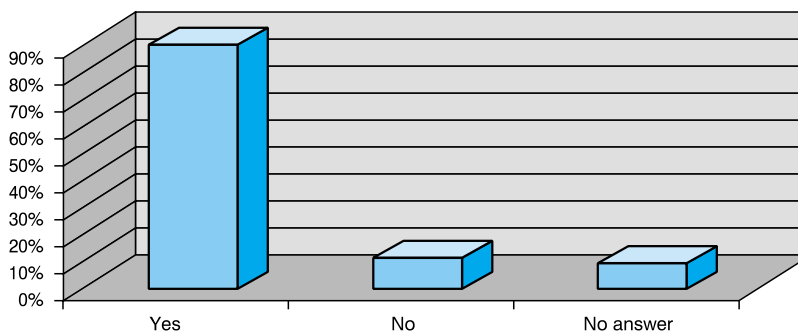
²³ Today there are many candidates for this role: the Democratic Union of Ukraine, the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), the Popular Democratic Party of Ukraine and the «Labour Ukraine» Party.

²⁴ Hereinafter the answers to the questions of the referendum are presented in percentage of respondents ready to take part in the vote.

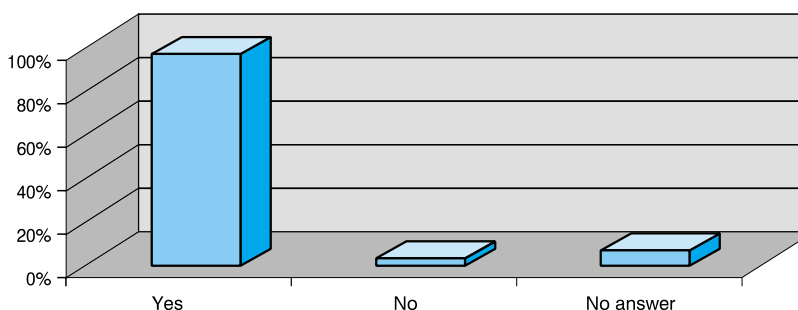
Public support for the proposal to grant President the right to terminate the powers of the Verkhovna Rada



Do you agree that parliamentary immunity of People's Deputies of Ukraine should be limited?



Do you agree with reduction of the total number of People's Deputies from 450 to 300?



vocation, and supported a constitutional provision for a legal mechanism to terminate Parliament's powers on the basis of expressed distrust.

60.7% of those polled believe the Verkhovna Rada's early termination to be possible if it does not manage to create a constructive majority within a month, or fails to approve the budget submitted by the Government within three months.

Limiting Deputy immunity was supported by 84.5%, and the proposal to reduce their total number (from 450 to 300) — by 90.8% of those polled.

Questions regarding the Verkhovna Rada's work were posed against the background of a deep parliamentary crisis. Parliament's temporary inactivity evidently contributed to the low estimate in the eyes of the population. And last but not least: the proposal to reduce the number of People's Deputies was supported for financial reasons, as taxpayers do not want to maintain 450 deputies, in addition to not considering their work effective.

The adoption of the Ukrainian Constitution at an all-Ukrainian referendum is supported by 74.1% of those polled. Public opinion on this issue appears to be stable. According to «Socis-Gallup»²⁵, even in 1996, over half of all Ukrainians (56%) thought that «people should adopt the Constitution at a referendum».

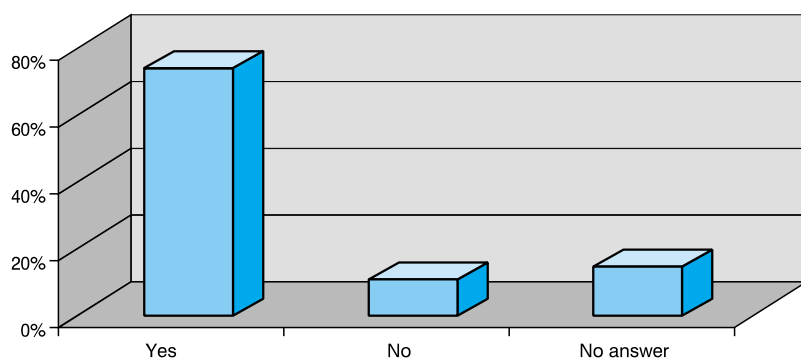
Half of the Ukrainian population (49.9%) suggests that if the Constitution is to be adopted at a referendum, several alternatives of the Basic law should be proposed. It is our hope that this will rule out the path that Russia took in 1993 when B. Yeltsin proposed only one draft of the Constitution, clearly intended to strengthen presidential powers, and the people were left without a choice.

The only proposal that does not enjoy the majority of the population's support is the establishment of a two-chambered parliament: 45% of those polled were in favour, while 24.2% were opposed to the idea (see *Diagram*).

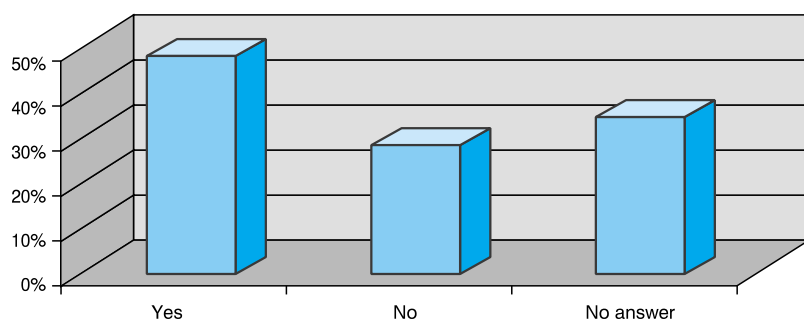
The share of respondents still hesitant about answering any of the proposed referendum questions is relatively high: 24.7% were unable to define their attitude to the Verkhovna Rada; 26.1% did not know whether Parliament was unable to form a con-

²⁵ The Ukrainian Political and Economic Index. — Socis-Gallup, Kyiv, June 1996, p. 18.

Do you agree that the Constitution of Ukraine should be adopted at an all-Ukrainian referendum?



Do you support the establishment of a two-chambered parliament in Ukraine, with the upper chamber representing and promoting the interests of Ukraine's regions?



structive majority and should be dissolved; 30.9% did not express their attitude toward a bicameral parliament. Public opinion, however, has already been formed, and those votes won't significantly influence referendum results.

The authorities should be prepared to put all referendum decisions into practice: this view is shared by 53.5% of polled respondents. This resolute position of the majority demonstrates the need for radical change in the activity of the authorities. We view this as an additional argument against the referendum: in the event that no confidence in Parliament is confirmed (which is the expected outcome, according to opinion polls), it will be difficult for the head of state to explain to the people why he is not dissolving the Verkhovna Rada and scheduling new parliamentary elections²⁶. Meanwhile, factors indicate that not only the parliamentary majority is not interested in the Verkhovna Rada's dissolution (quite understandable), but neither is the President.

Ukraine's President can count on the firm support for five out of the six referendum proposals. Public opinion has already been formed; no great surprises are expected. Parliament's further destiny will depend on its ability to constructively co-operate with the President and Government. The head of state possesses effective mechanisms of influence over Parliament's work.



²⁶ According to the Law of Ukraine «On the All-Ukrainian and Local Referendum», decisions taken at a referendum are obligatory for implementation and do not require additional approval. It is clear that in the event of a reduction in the number of People's Deputies from 450 to 300, Parliament won't be able to work in its present composition.

VOTING MOTIVES: THE IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA

Based on reviewed campaigns «for» and «against» the referendum, UCEPS experts analysed the impact of mass media on the public consciousness of Ukrainian citizens. During the poll, respondents were offered some cliches often used in mass media, such as: «the cancellation of immunity will lead to political pressure on the People's Deputies», or «all people must be equal before the law», etc. Through the use of such cliches, one can understand people's motives that determine their position on the referendum questions.

More than half of those polled (55.1%) supports the referendum, because «authorities should consult the people». At the same time, a quarter of the respondents (25.6%) believes that this is «a waste of public funds»²⁷.

Among those who support the cancellation of People's Deputy immunity, 89.8% are certain that «all people should be equal before the law». Meanwhile, 4.8% of the respondents spoke out against such a decision, as the «cancellation of immunity may be used to place pressure on People's Deputies».

A large share of the population suggests that not only Parliament's responsibility should be increased (as suggested by the referendum's questions), but also that of the

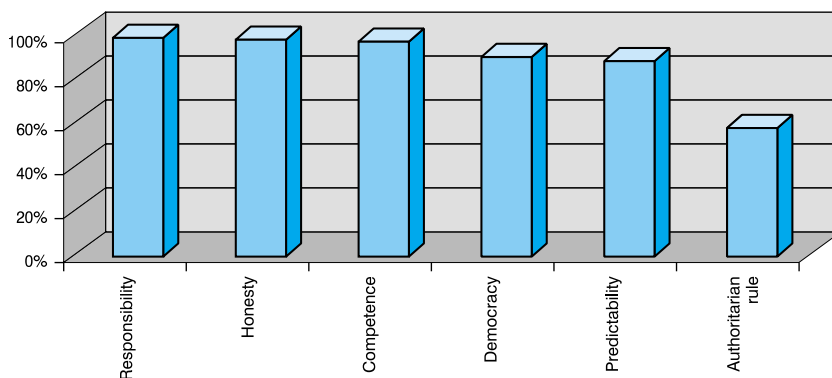
President. According to UCEPS poll results, 43.9% of Ukrainians support simplifying the presidential impeachment procedure, as it is «unreasonably difficult».

As far as arguments in favour of a two-chambered parliament are concerned, 37.4% of respondents consider that «regional interests are not represented in the Verkhovna Rada». Their share is higher in the Crimea and in Ukraine's Western regions. Among those who oppose the idea of creating a two-chambered parliament, 13.1% express their certainty that such a step will «contribute to federalisation and, in the long run, to Ukraine's disintegration». Nearly one-third of Ukrainians (31.1%) was unable to decide on this issue. UCEPS experts suggest that this demonstrates the population's lack of awareness regarding the principles underlying how a two-chambered parliament is formed and works²⁸.

Meanwhile, during discussions regarding Ukraine's draft Constitution in 1996, there were two times less supporters of a bicameral parliament than now; more than half of Ukrainians (56%) could not formulate their position²⁹ (at present, their share is 31.1%). Therefore, employing new election technologies in mass media (including the cliches mentioned above) makes it possible to influence public consciousness quite effectively.

The cliches used in mass media («all people should be equal before the law», «authorities should consult the people», etc.) have become established in the public consciousness and affect the formation of the public's position prior to the referendum. Further significant changes in public opinion in favour of a two-chambered parliament can be predicted if the authorities come to a final decision in this respect (and on the expediency of the referendum in general).

Do you suggest that the procedure of dismissal (impeachment) of President of Ukraine should be simplified?



²⁷ Therefore, the population supports the undertaking of this relatively expensive event (according to the Central Electoral Commission, «consulting the people» will cost taxpayers UAH 50 million; the 2000 budget allocates UAH 30 million).

²⁸ There is most likely no common view on the formation of Parliament's upper chamber in the President's circle (proposals were heard regarding the appointment of its members — to elect them by direct vote, to elect them at regional councils, etc.). It is clear that the appointment of «senators» is unacceptable, if the principle of the division of powers, democratic norms, and the international community's possible negative reaction are taken into account. The upper chamber's election will not only create an additional counterbalance, but also a centre of power that the President will have to deal with. Regional influence will increase, powers will be re-apportioned, and the legislative process will become disorganised for quite some time. To assess the potential powers of Ukraine's «senators», one should turn to Russia (the Federation Council never agreed to the dismissal of the Procurator-General Yu. Skuratov).

²⁹ The Ukrainian Political and Economic Index. — Socis-Gallup, Kyiv, June 1996, p. 17.



WILL THERE BE MASS PROTESTS IN UKRAINE?

Under present conditions, the long-awaited reform will require unpopular steps that will be negatively accepted by a large part of the population. In supporting the Yushchenko Government's initiative, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a number of such decisions aimed at cancelling privileges for many categories of people. An increase in housing and utility tariffs to 100%, transport tariff increases, and other similar steps, lie ahead. How will the population respond to these and other unpopular measures? Will Ukraine turn into an arena of mass protests?



Do the preconditions for a social explosion exist in the country?

UCEPS polls demonstrate that the critical potential for a large-scale social explosion has not gathered strength yet in the mass consciousness of Ukrainian citizens (this possibility concerns only 5.9% of Ukrainians).

Mass protests will take place mainly within the limits of the law.

More than half of Ukrainians (56.2%) «would never take part» even in lawful protests, while 26.6% of respondents are ready for such actions. Every fourth individual polled (25.9%) is prepared to sign petitions — trust in the effectiveness of mass complaints and letters from the working people is still alive in the country. 9% of Ukrainians are

potentially prepared to take part in unlawful protests; 1.4% stated that they already took part in such actions. The seizure of administrative buildings and enterprises might involve 3.7% of those polled.

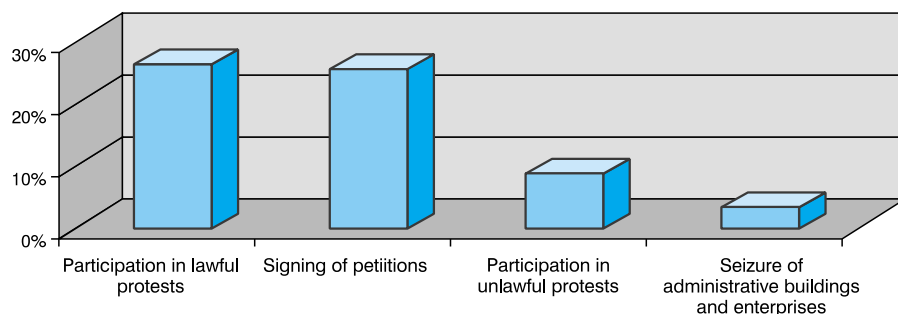
People aged between 29 and 41 appeared to be the most prepared to participate in unlawful actions. People from the same group are also prepared to become the «main driving force» behind the occupation of administrative buildings and enterprises.

According to polls, the highest share of those who are ready to take part in unlawful meetings and demonstrations, and the seizure of administrative buildings and enterprises can be observed in Ukraine's industrial regions. The population of those regions is more «mobile» and better organised and is comprised of miners and large enterprise workers who do not receive their wages for months and suffer economic hardships.

There is a noticeable gap between the potential readiness to take part in protests and actual participation in such actions. When asked «Why didn't you take part in active political actions?», 39.3% of respondents answered that they did not consider «such actions effective, because authorities ignore them, anyway»³⁰. 34.8% of those polled said that there «had been no reason» for participating in protests; the indifference of the polled individual's social circle restrains 8.2%; absence of a leader — 14.2% of those polled. In our view, today there is a real lack in Ukraine of respected leaders able to lead protests throughout the country. Furthermore, Ukrainians mentally tend to resolve their problems through non-violent means.

These data demonstrate the low probability of mass protests in the near future (especially such actions as the seizure of administrative buildings and enterprises, unsanctioned meetings and demonstrations). The people's mass disappointment is gradually transformed into social apathy; people survive, relying on their own strengths and capabilities, without hoping for any serious assistance from the state. Many Ukrainians are certain that no protests will push the authorities to changes for the better. Strikes and meetings mainly under social and economic slogans should be expected in industrial and mining regions.

People's readiness to take part in mass protests



³⁰ The percentage of respondents who did not take part in such protests so far but potentially could participate in them.

CONCLUSIONS

The mass consciousness of Ukrainians reflects the system crisis of the authorities that defines the discrepancy between the desired good image of authorities, on the one hand, and the real assessment of the activities of the present state power bodies and low level of confidence in the institutions of power, on the other. All state institutions are far from the ideal image depicted by the population, but the Verkhovna Rada corresponds to it least of all.

Critical assessments of the Verkhovna Rada condition the generally negative attitude toward parliamentary practice as an institution of democratic government. An early dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada will not cause mass protests; on the contrary, this step on the part of the Ukrainian President will be supported by the overwhelming majority of the population (but not by the People's Deputies).

The level of trust in the authorities, in general, is very low. This complicates and, to a certain extent, hinders radical reform. Unpopular steps taken by the Yushchenko Government may bring about disappointment regarding its activity and a loss of hope by the people for overcoming Ukraine's present economic crisis.

Despite all difficulties, Ukraine's population retains hope in democratically resolving urgent social problems. Authoritarian tendencies in the public consciousness are not yet dangerous; moreover, there are no preconditions for dictatorship in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian population associates its hopes with more resolute actions by Ukraine's President, and tends to support a presidential-parliamentary system or presidential republic as more effective forms of government during the transitional period.

The social basis for radical political forces in Ukraine is insufficient. Favourable conditions exist for a victory of political parties exploiting centrist ideas and for a reduction of the representation of extremist political forces after early parliamentary elections (should such elections be held).

In the event that the referendum is held on April 16, the present head of state will most likely obtain further support after the November 1999 presidential elections. After the referendum, the President of Ukraine will obtain additional mechanisms of influence over the work of Parliament. Last but not least, the referendum's expected results will be conditioned by the extremely negative perception of the Verkhovna Rada's activities and by a mass media propaganda campaign.

The population's political activity will generally stay within the legal limitations. Mass protests will mainly pursue economic purposes, while political actions will remain few.